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SUBJECT: AIR INDIA "TRIAL OF THE CENTURY" CONTINUES IN VANCOUVER

¶1. SUMMARY: THE TRIAL OF TWO SUSPECTS IN THE 1985 BOMBING OF AIR INDIA FLIGHT 182, WHICH BEGAN IN FEBRUARY, CONTINUES AT THE BRITISH COLUMBIA SUPREME COURT. THE AIR INDIA CASE IS THE LARGEST CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION IN CANADIAN HISTORY AND THE TRIAL IS EXPECTED TO BE UNPRECEDENTED IN LENGTH AND COMPLEXITY. IT IS ESTIMATED IT WILL LAST WELL INTO 2004. THE RCMP HAS INVESTIGATED THE CASE FOR 18 YEARS. ACCUSATIONS CONTINUE THAT SECTORS OF THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT IGNORED CLUES THAT MAY HAVE PREVENTED THE BOMBING. THE TRIAL HAS BEEN ADJOURNED UNTIL SEPTEMBER 8TH, 2003. END SUMMARY.

¶2. BACKGROUND: ON JUNE 23, 1985, AIR INDIA FLIGHT 182 FROM MONTREAL TO LONDON, CARRYING LUGGAGE LOADED IN VANCOUVER, EXPLODED AND CRASHED INTO THE ATLANTIC OCEAN 240 KILOMETERS OFF THE COAST OF IRELAND. ALL 329 PEOPLE ON BOARD WERE KILLED. FIFTY-FOUR MINUTES EARLIER, A SUITCASE LOADED IN VANCOUVER ONTO CANADIAN AIRLINES FLIGHT 003 EXPLODED IN THE AIRPORT AT NARITA, JAPAN. THE SUITCASE WAS BEING TRANSFERRED TO AIR INDIA FLIGHT 301 TO BANGKOK AND DELHI. TWO BAGGAGE HANDLERS WERE KILLED AND FOUR OTHER PERSONS INJURED.

¶3. POLICE ALLEGE VANCOUVER MILLIONAIRE RIPUDAMAN SINGH MALIK AND AJAIB SINGH BAGRI PLANNED TO BOMB FLIGHT 182 AS PART OF A TERRORISM CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT. BOTH MEN WERE ALLEGED SIKH SEPARATISTS PLOTTING AGAINST THE NATIONAL AIRLINE OF INDIA IN RETALIATION FOR THE INDIAN ARMY'S ATTACK A YEAR EARLIER ON THE GOLDEN TEMPLE AT AMRITSAR, SIKHISM'S HOLIEST SHRINE. THE SUSPECTED MASTERMIND WAS TALWINDER SINGH PARMAR, A MILITANT SIKH RELIGIOUS LEADER IN VANCOUVER. HOWEVER, HE WAS NEVER CHARGED WITH MURDER AS PUNJABI POLICE KILLED HIM IN 1992. ON OCTOBER 27, 2000, MALIK AND BAGRI WERE ARRESTED IN RELATION TO THE BOMBINGS; THEY WERE CHARGED JOINTLY WITH EIGHT COUNTS INCLUDING MURDER, ATTEMPTED MURDER AND CONSPIRACY.

¶4. THE POSSIBILITY OF AN ATTACK ON AIR INDIA WAS WIDELY KNOWN IN THE WEEKS BEFORE THE AIR INDIA BOMBING. MANY B.C. SIKHS HAD CALLED FOR A BOYCOTT OF THE AIRLINE. THE VANCOUVER SUN REPORTED IN OCTOBER 2000 THAT PARMAR MADE A FIERY SPEECH AT A SIKH TEMPLE IN SOUTHEAST CALGARY IN THE SUMMER OF 1984 THAT AIR INDIA PLANES WOULD "FALL FROM THE SKY." PARMAR'S MESSAGE WAS DELIVERED PRIVATELY TO A GROUP OF ABOUT 20 WHO GATHERED IN THE TEMPLE TO HEAR THE FOUNDER OF ONE OF THE MOST MILITANT SIKH SEPARATIST GROUPS -- THE BABBAR KHALSA OR TIGERS OF THE TRUE FAITH.

¶5. THE LOCAL PRESS HAS DESCRIBED A CONTROVERSY THAT HAS DEVELOPED BETWEEN THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE (RCMP) AND CANADIAN INTELLIGENCE (CSIS) OVER THE CONDUCT OF THE INVESTIGATION AND WHETHER OR NOT THE TRAGEDY COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, MONTHS BEFORE THE BOMBING THE RCMP INVESTIGATED A TIP THAT AN AIR INDIA PLANE OUT OF MONTREAL WOULD BE BOMBED. THE RCMP ASKED CSIS FOR A THREAT ASSESSMENT ON ITS LIKELIHOOD. POLICE CRITICS SUGGEST THAT CSIS IGNORED CLUES THAT COULD HAVE PREVENTED THE BOMBING. THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN ALLEGATIONS THAT THERE WAS A CSIS MOLE WORKING WITH THE ALLEGED BOMBING CONSPIRATORS. HOWEVER, THE RCMP AND THE CSIS HAVE BOTH DENIED THESE ALLEGATIONS. THE AIR INDIA TRIAL IS CERTAIN TO GENERATE CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC DEBATE, MULTIPLE CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND ABUNDANT CRITICISM OF FORMER AND CURRENT PUBLIC OFFICIALS AS IT PROCEEDS OVER THE COMING YEAR OR MORE.

